

Message Text

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64

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSM-05 CIAE-00 COME-00 DOTE-00

EB-07 FMC-02 INR-07 NSAE-00 SAL-01 CG-00 DLOS-06

OES-06 PA-02 USIA-15 PRS-01 SP-02 AID-05 /082 W

----- 050945

R 301300Z NOV 76

FM AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0493

INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

DIA

USCINCEUR

CINCUSNAVEUR

FOSIF ROTA SPAIN

NOSIC SUITLAND MD

COMSIXTHFLT

UNCLAS ALEXANDRIA 0734

E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: EWWT

SUBJECT: BAD WEATHER CLOSES ALEXANDRIA PORT

1. ALEXANDRIA PORT WAS CLOSED FOR FIRST EXTENDED PERIOD
THIS WINTER SEASON BY BAD WEATHER FOR FIVE CONSECUTIVE DAYS -
NOVEMBER 24 THROUGH 29. A FEW VESSELS DID ENTER AND LEAVE PORT
WHILE IT WAS OFFICIALLY CLOSED, BUT THEY DID SO WITH CAPTAINS
ACCEPTING PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR MOVING VESSELS. PILOT BOATS
ARE ANCIENT, UNDER-POWERED CRAFT WHICH MAKE EGYPTIAN PILOTS
RELUCTANT TO VENTURE OUTSIDE HARBOR IN BREEZY WEATHER. IN OPINION
OF AMERICAN CAPTAIN NOW IN ALEXANDRIA, SHIPS COULD HAVE BEEN MOVED
SAFELY DURING ONE OR TWO DAYS OF PORT CLOSURE IF PILOTS COULD
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HAVE BEEN PUT ABOARD WAITING SHIPS. DURING REMAINING PERIOD

HIGH WINDS AND 12 TO 15 FOOT SWELLS MADE ENTERING OR LEAVING VIA NARROW CHANNEL HAZARDOUS FOR ORDINARY MERCHANTMEN. CONDITIONS WERE NOT SUCH AS TO PREVENT MOVEMENT OF PASSENGER SHIPS, MILITARY VESSELS, TUGS AND OTHER RELATIVELY HIGH POWERED CRAFT.

2. DURING WEEK BEFORE PORT CLOSURE (NOVEMBER 14-20) NUMBER OF SHIPS WAITING TO ENTER ALEXANDRIA AVERAGED BETWEEN 39 AND 42. THIS IS ABNORMALLY HIGH NUMBER CONSIDERING FACT WEATHER HAS BEEN EXCELLENT AND USUAL RAMADAN SLOWDOWN ENDED IN LATE SEPTEMBER. (RULE OF THUMB IS THAT 15-20 VESSELS WAITING IS "NORMAL", WITH 25 OR MORE BEING CAUSE FOR CONCERN.) ONE DAY AFTER PORT CLOSED (NOV 25), 47 SHIPS WERE WAITING; ON DAY PORT REOPENED (NOV 29), MORE THAN 60 SHIPS WERE IN THE QUEUE.

3. SOME SHIPS UNDOUBTABLY GAVE UP WAITING OUTSIDE ALEXANDRIA AND SAILED FOR OTHER PORTS. ONE SUCH VESSEL WAS PRUDENTIAL LINES' "LASH PACIFICO" WHICH ARRIVED MORNING OF NOVEMBER 22 AND LEFT NOVEMBER 26 FOR PIRAEUS. LASH SHIPS CALLING HERE NORMALLY EXPECT TO DISCHARGE THEIR LIGHTERS ON DAY OF ARRIVAL AND DEPART SAME DAY OR FOLLOWING MORNING. "LASH PACIFICO" WAITED FOR TWO FULL GOOD DAYS PLUS TWO BAD DAYS TO NO AVAIL. WE UNDERSTAND SHIP ONLY HAD NINE LIGHTERS TO OFFLOAD WHICH COULD HAVE BEEN HANDLED IN FEW HOURS IF IT HAD BEEN PERMITTED TO ANCHOR IN THE HARBOR LONG ENOUGH TO ACCOMPLISH THIS. WE HAD OPPORTUNITY RAISE THIS MATTER INFORMALLY WITH DIRECTOR GENERAL OF PORTS AND LIGHTS AUTHORITY ON EVENING OF NOVEMBER 29, REMINDING HIM OF VERY HIGH OPERATING COSTS OF LASH VESSELS (\$15,000-25,000 A DAY). WE POINTED OUT FEW HOURS OF LASH UNLOADING AT ANCHOR INSIDE PORT REPRESENTED FEW DAYS AT OVERCROWDED DOCKSIDE BY REGULAR CARGO LINER, SO IT TO PORT MANAGEMENT'S OWN ADVANTAGE TO HANDLE LASH VESSELS EXPEDITIOUSLY AND THUS TO ENCOURAGE SHIPPERS TO USE THIS UP-TO-DATE SERVICE.

4. AS AN ASIDE WITH AMUSING OVERTONES, WE LEARNED FROM THE DIRECTOR GENERAL THAT ONE OF SHIPS LEAVING AT OWN RISK WAS FRENCH VESSEL SS AZUR. THIS 11,000 TON FERRY, SERVING AS CRUISE SHIP, LEFT THIRTY HOURS LATE, AFTER STORM WAVES HAD PITCHED IT AGAINST PIER DEEP IN INNER HARBOR, BREAKING OPEN, THEN NEARLY BREAKING OFF, ONE STERN LOADING RAMP. AFTER TEMPORARY REPAIRS (ALEXANDRIA SHIPYARDS FITTER RAMP BACK INTO PLACE AND WELDED IT UNCLASSIFIED

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SHUT), CAPTAIN TOOK EGYPTIAN PILOT AND DEPARTED, HAVING PROMISED DIRECTOR GENERAL TO DROP HIM AT NEXT PORT AND ARRANGE FAST RETURN TO ALEXANDRIA. DIRECTOR GENERAL WAS SOMEWHAT SHAKEN WHEN WE TOLD HIM, AS LEARNED FROM EMBASSY TUNIS OFFICER TAKING CRUISE, THAT NEXT SCHEDULED STOP IS HAIFA, ISRAEL. WE BOTH HOPED CAPTIAN WOULD DETOUR VIA CYPRUS PORT.

5. ALUSNA CAIRO REQUESTED MILITARY ADDRESSEES. CONGEN WILL PROVIDE

PERIODIC UPDATES ON PORT CONGESTION DURING WINTER.
CHASE

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